

Food Assistance

Food Stamps

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| Purpose | The Food Assistance program (the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps) provides nutrition to low-income Iowans. |
| Who | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ In July 2011, a record 389,000 people received benefits, up 11 percent from a year earlier.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The economy has contributed to the increase.○ Another factor is legislation that, beginning January 2011, expanded eligibility. Previously most households had to be within the gross income limit of 130% of the federal poverty level (\$1,594/month for a family of two) to be eligible. Now, most households with gross income up to 160% of the federal poverty level (\$1,962/month for a family of two) qualify.▪ About one in seven Americans receive food assistance. In Iowa, it's about one in eight. As a percent of population receiving benefits, Iowa ranks 35th. |
| What | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The average household benefit was \$269/month in July 2011. The average individual benefit was \$124, an average benefit per meal of about \$1.37.▪ Benefits in Iowa and nationwide were increased about 13.6 percent in April 2009 as part of the federal economic stimulus plan. Benefits will not increase again until at least 2014.▪ Eligibility and benefits are based on federal rules that consider size of household, income, household expenses, and other variables.▪ Benefits are funded 100 percent with federal dollars. The cost of administering the program is shared 50-50 with states. About \$558.8 million in federal food assistance funds were brought into the Iowa economy in SFY 2011, a nearly 10 percent one-year increase. The USDA estimates that \$5 in food assistance generates \$9.20 in local and state economic activity. |
| How are we doing? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Federal data show that 75 percent of eligible Iowans receive benefits, which places Iowa 13th in the country.▪ Turnaround times – days needed to process applications – are growing but are still well within federal guidelines.▪ Caseloads for DHS income maintenance workers exceed 700 and are expected to grow to over 850 in the next two years, causing delays in some areas and leading to staff turnover. However, efficiency has increased due to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use of electronic case files, enabling workers to handle applications no matter where the record originates.○ Maintaining a customer call center in Council Bluffs to administer changes to individual cases.○ Receipt of more than 50 percent of applications online. See www.oasis.iowa.gov▪ Iowa ranked 5th most improved in accurately determining benefits in federal fiscal 2010, with Iowa cutting the error rate in half. The error rate was 3.36 percent compared to 6.49 percent a year earlier. The national error rate was 3.81 percent, an all-time low, with Iowa ranked 19th overall.▪ Iowa is a national leader in enabling recipients to use benefits at farmers markets. More than 110 markets have wireless devices to accept EBT cards. |